

# **THE EXPERIENCE OF AMERICAN UNDERGRADUATES IN STUDY-ABROAD PROGRAMMES IN SOUTH AFRICA**

by

**ROBERTA JAMES PAOLA**

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**SUPERVISOR: PROF EM LEMMER**

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I declare that:

**The Experience of American Undergraduates in Study-Abroad Programmes in  
South Africa**

is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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SIGNATURE  
(Mrs. R.J. Paola)

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DATE  
12 January 2005

*In loving memory*  
*of*  
*Robert and Mary James*

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## **SUMMARY**

### **The Experience of American Undergraduates in Study-Abroad Programmes in South Africa**

Study-abroad in the United States traces its roots back to early colonial times. The concept of spending a semester or year abroad during the undergraduate degree programme is not a new one; however increasing emphasis has been placed upon the need for acquiring a global education to cope with the demands of an ever increasing internationalised world. The traditional locations for American undergraduates who chose to study-abroad have always been and continue to be Western Europe. Yet, with a culture similar to that of the United States, the question of what intercultural learning takes place is an apt one. Emphasis on non-traditional locations is increasing, yet few studies have been undertaken which examine the experience of American undergraduates who do choose non-traditional destinations for their study-abroad experience. This research examines, through a qualitative study, using in-depth, semi-structured descriptive interviews, the experience of six American undergraduates who chose to spend a semester in South Africa from January to June 2004. A focus group of professionals within the American university study-abroad setting was also interviewed in May of 2003 to determine factors of interest to professionals within the field. The major findings included: The traditional barriers to study-abroad were not applicable to the students studied, however, barriers dealing with lack of information or inaccurate information regarding South Africa and non-promotion of South Africa as a first world country were found to be relevant as deterrents to students choosing South Africa as a destination for study-abroad. The most relevant factors that influenced students to study-abroad in South Africa were found to be: prior academic coursework in African studies at the home institution, the perception that it was a destination that offered opportunities for personal enjoyment and learning prospects in a unique cultural setting in addition to the fact that the host institution's language of instruction was English. Based on these findings, relevant recommendations for further research in this field were suggested.

**Key Words:** undergraduate study, study-abroad, United States, South Africa, international education, college, university, tertiary education, internationalisation, cultural immersion, cultural adaptation, experiential education, heritage seeker, academic experiences.

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